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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 001041

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [FR](#) [SY](#) [IR](#) [LE](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: STOCKTAKING WITH FRENCH PRESIDENCY DIPLOMATIC
ADVISOR

REF: STATE 27178

Classified By: DCM Alex Wolff for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: DCM spoke with President Chirac's Diplomatic Advisor Maurice Gourdault-Montagne (MGM) February 17 to review French position on key issues in advance of President Bush's February 21 meeting with President Chirac and the subsequent meetings with NATO and EU leaders. Gourdault-Montagne said the French side was preparing for the meetings in the spirit of cooperation and was convinced all three would be successful. He said there would be no surprises from the French side, and hoped none would come from ours. On specific issues, Paris is taking a more timid approach to Syria than ours; there is no shift in France's cautious approach toward Hizbollah; there is some hope for a French contribution to NATO's trust fund for Iraqi training; and Paris is willing to consider an ISAF-OEF merger. End Summary.

Syria

12. (C) DCM reviewed steps the U.S. had taken with Damascus and Beirut following the death of former Lebanese PM Hariri (reftel), noting that we had not seen signs of similar actions by the French. Clearly uncomfortable with being pressed on this point, MGM eventually affirmed that the French would not recall their Ambassador and had not yet delivered a strong message to the Syrians. DCM said that Washington and Paris had maintained a common approach to the Syrians up to this point, but now there seemed to be growing distance in our respective responses to the latest developments. MGM insisted that France remained committed to UNSCR 1559 and wanted to ratchet up pressure. At the same time, it had only been a few days since Hariri's death and it was important to think carefully about next steps and to act deftly with Damascus in order to be effective. He added that President Chirac would want to discuss the situation with President Bush, and to explore the questions of sanctions, particularly how the Syrian Accountability Act was being applied.

Hizbollah Designation

13. (C) DCM emphasized the importance of designating Hizbollah in the context of the latest developments in Lebanon and asked if the French position would now change. MGM said there would be no change in the French position. Recent events, he explained, demonstrated how fragile the situation was in Lebanon. The Shia element was extremely important: any such measures targeting Hizbollah would be useless and would contribute to further destabilization. He concluded that President Chirac would explain his reasoning to President Bush.

NATO Trust Fund for Iraqi Training

14. (C) DCM pushed for a French contribution to the NATO Trust Fund for training Iraqi security forces, noting that France was the only country yet to contribute to the collective effort. MGM responded by citing the French offer to train 1,500 Iraqis, at a cost of 15 million Euros, and support for a proposed EU training program for administrative personnel. He claimed that France's contribution in both these efforts would make it the single largest European contributor to Iraqi training, and could not be compared with modest amounts paid by other European countries to the NATO effort. DCM said we were not interested in comparing contributions, but ensuring that there was solidarity among the allies in this effort. He reiterated that France was the only government not doing its part in the NATO effort and it would be important in connection with the President's visit to show transatlantic unity through a program that involves all allies. MGM, acknowledging that the French side had not yet made a decision whether to contribute said "we'll see," adding that there were still five days before the Brussels meeting to consider this further.

15. (C) MGM returned to the French offer to train 1,500 Iraqis, questioning why there had been no response from Baghdad taking up the offer. He said this continued to puzzle the French government, which was beginning to wonder

if there was any outside influence telling the Iraqis not to respond. DCM stated that if by "outside influence" MGM was suggesting the U.S. had any role in the matter, he could categorically deny it. We, too, were puzzled by the absence of an Iraqi response and were seeking further insights from our experts. Perhaps, DCM concluded, we were all underestimating how much residual anger existed among Iraqis toward France for its perceived relationship with the former regime. But the U.S. remained supportive of French efforts to help Iraq.

Afghanistan

16. (C) MGM said the French position on further contributions to Afghanistan had not changed since Defense Minister Alliot-Marie addressed the issue at the Nice Defense Ministerial. There was no shift in France's position on PRTs. Paris was considering the proposal to merge ISAF and OEF, but would want guarantees that U.S. forces would not leave Afghanistan. (He said the French would welcome similar guarantees regarding U.S. forces in the Balkans.) DCM responded that the U.S. had no intention of leaving in an uncoordinated manner when the situation eventually allowed for our departure.
No Surprises for the President

17. (C) DCM referred to U.S. concerns about elements of Chancellor Schroeder's Munich speech. As we were headed toward a series of extremely important meetings next week in Brussels, how did the French perceive the situation? MGM said we shouldn't exaggerate Schroeder's comments, noting that there was a "big fuss over very little". DCM noted that we had an important opportunity next week to build on recent efforts by both sides to improve both the tone and level of cooperation between us. MGM said the meetings were bound to be a success since both sides wanted this very much: "There would be no surprises from the French side." By the same token, he continued, he hoped there would be no surprises or pressure from the U.S. side that would emerge at the last minute as an unexpected test of Allied fidelity: "give the Allies breathing space; its better when the Allies have breathing space; the Allies like breathing space". He reiterated that the French side was approaching the meetings in the same good spirit that characterized Secretary Rice's visit and the Nice Ministerial. MGM concluded that the French side would be working to prepare for the meetings through the weekend. DCM asked that the French side keep us apprised of any decisions that might have an effect on the meetings.

Leach